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The War at Sea

Scott Stephenson: So, as you step into this Gallery, you can't miss the replica ship docked in Philadelphia, in the middle of the Revolutionary War. As you move around the ship, you have an opportunity to explore the different steps to sign aboard a privateer during the American Revolution. You can walk up a ramp and board the ship and learn more about life at sea in the Revolutionary era, but before you do, look for the facade of the dockside building next to the ship. You can see a sailor perched precariously on a barrel with a paintbrush in his hand, and he's painted our third question, "How revolutionary was the war?" on the side of the building. Remember, we've just been through a series of Galleries. It took us through our second question: "How did the Revolution survive its darkest hour?"

It's now 1778, and word has arrived from France that King Louis XVI has declared openly in support of the United States of America. France will now help Americans win their independence. At the front end of the ship, in a small white and gold trimmed theater, you can have a seat and watch a short film that explores the power of American ideals abroad and the new alliances with France and Spain that came about after 1778. As the prospects of becoming an independent nation brightened, the question facing Americans is who would enjoy the rights of citizenship in this emerging nation?

For example, look into the windows of the large whitewashed clapboard building where you'll meet Elizabeth and Henry Drinker, a Quaker couple who lived just a few blocks from where we're standing now. As Quakers, their religious principles prevented them from supporting war, including paying taxes that might support a war effort. Both sides in the conflict viewed Quakers as politically suspect. They were one of the groups whose place in the emerging American Republic was uncertain.